

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1390

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJ: ARAB EDUCATIONAL AID FOR THE SOUTH

SUMMARY. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IS DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS FOR SOUTHERNTHAILAND, FUNDED BY ARAB MONEY. INITIAL THAI RESERVATIONS ABOUT AID HAVE BEEN EASED BY ARAB AGREEMENT TO MAKE AID UNCONDITIONAL, AND MOE IS GOING AHEAD WITH PROPOSALS. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION OF ARAB ASSISTANCE TO MUSLIM EDUCATION IN THAILAND HAS BEEN PIECED TOGETHER ON BASIS OF EXTENDED CONVERSATIONS WITH OFFICIALS OF THAI MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IS DEVELOPING TWO EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS FOR THE SOUTH WHICH WILL BE FUNDED BY ARAB AID MONEY. OCCASIONAL REPORTS ABOUT SUCH AID HAVE SURFACED IN THE PRESS OVER THE PAST YEAR, AND THE MOE ANNOUNCED WORK ON THE PROJECTS AT THE END OF DECEMBER 1975. THE LARGEST OFFER IS FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, IN THE AMOUNT OF FOUR MILLION DOLLARS. A MUCH SMALLER OFFER OF TEN THOUSAND POUNDS STERLING HAS BEEN MADE BY EGYPT.

2. THE OFFERS WERE ORIGINALLY MADE TO AID THAI/MUSLIMS
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IN THE SOUTH AND INVOLVED ESTABLISHING ISLAMIC STUDIES

PROGRAMS AT VARIOUS SCHOOLS THERE. LOCAL MUSLIM LEADERS INSISTED THAT THE MONEY SHOULD BE SPENT ONLY ON MUSLIM SCHOOLS TEACHING IN ARABIC OR MALAY (AND UNDER THEIR CONTROL). THEY HAVE COMPLAINED THAT SOUTHERN MUSLIMS CAN RARELY PASS THAI LANGUAGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS FOR THAI UNIVERSITIES, AND THEY ALSO FEAR THAT MUSLIM STUDENTS WHO ATTEND SUCH UNIVERSITIES WILL ABANDON THEIR FAITH.

3. THAI OFFICIALS OBJECTED TO ACCEPTING FOREIGN AID IF ITS USES WERE PREDETERMINED BY THE DONOR COUNTRY. THAI OFFICIALS ALSO OPPOSED THE DEMANDS OF MUSLIM LEADERS AS DESCRIBED IN PARA 2. SOME ALSO WORRIED THAT SUCH AID MIGHT PERMIT ARAB INTERFERENCE IN THAI AFFAIRS AND SPECIFICALLY FACILITATE CLANDESTINE ARAB AID TO MUSLIM SEPARATISTS. HOWEVER, BOTH EGYPT AND THE UAE REPORTEDLY HAVE AGREED TO GIVE THE AID WITH NO CONDITIONS ATTACHED AND WHILE THERE ARE STILL SOME OFFICIALS WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE AID, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IS GOING AHEAD WITH THE PROPOSALS. THE EGYPTIAN AID WILL BE USED FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE PRINCE OF SONGKHLA UNIVERSITY. (PSU HAS FOUR CAMPUSES IN SOUTHER THAILAND.) THE UAE AID WILL BE USED IN PART FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES PROGRAMS, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY SO, AND ALL COURSES WILL BE CONDUCTED IN THE THAI LANGUAGE. AID WILL GO TO HIGH SCHOOLS, VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS, AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTH. BOTH THE MOE AND THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE PROPOSALS WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE DONOR COUNTRIES SOON FOR FINAL APPROVAL. MASTERS

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